Thumbs Up Crying Cat - JabGood on Discord

Anka Stieber

Soubor Úpravy Zobrazit Obrázek Barvy Nápověda

The Cat as a Digital Familiar

Nápovědu získáte klepnutím na položku Témata nápovědy v nabídce Nápověda.

Cat and Mice - Robert A Nelson 1975

The Cat as a Digital Familiar

Soubor Úpravy Zobrazit Vložit Formát Nápověda

Tahoma 18 Západní

The Cat as a Digital Familiar
made by Anka Stieber
as part of Digital Occultism Symposium
Vienna, June 2025

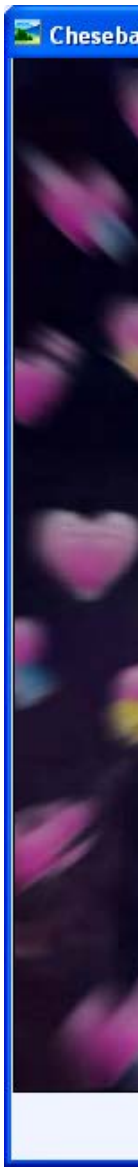
dɪ:'ʌngewʌndtə
Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien
University of Applied Arts Vienna

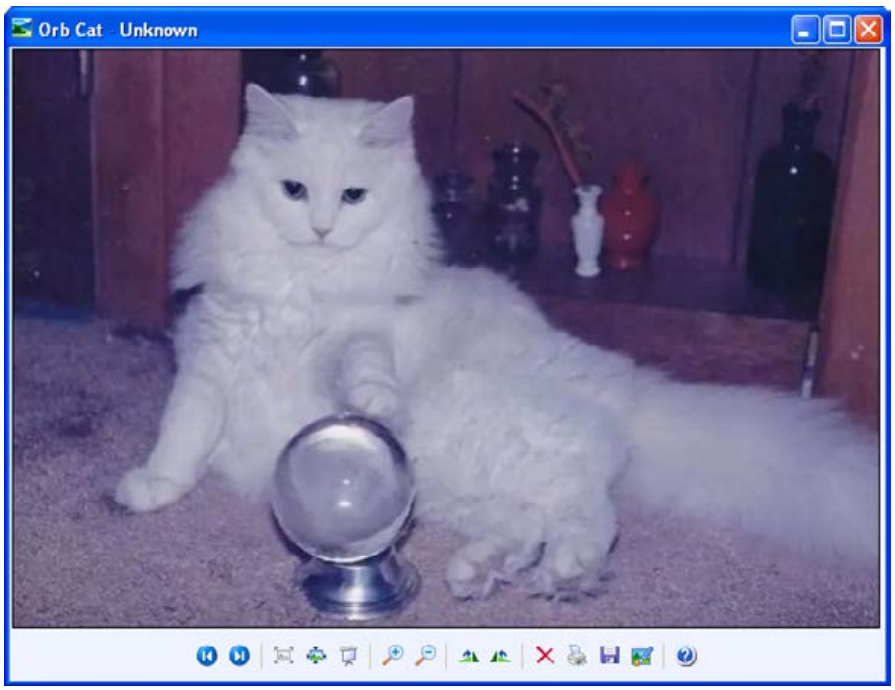
Nápovědu zobrazíte stisknutím klávesy F1.

Cheeseball the Wizard Cat - gatainarios on x

From frogs to capybaras, the internet loves to fixate on cute and quirky animals. It's attention cycles quickly, jumping from the Socially Awkward Penguin to Doge, to Pepe the frog, or Moodeng the pygmy hippo. However, there seems to be one animal, which has a constant grasp on internet users, present from the very beginning, never leaving their side. That, of course, being the household cat.

Cats have been domesticated for almost 10,000 years, enabling them to become recurring symbols in folklore, mysticism and now, meme culture. Bridging ancient esoteric traditions with modern digital rituals, the cat can serve as what can be coined a digital familiar, a loyal companion, which helps us navigate the online world.





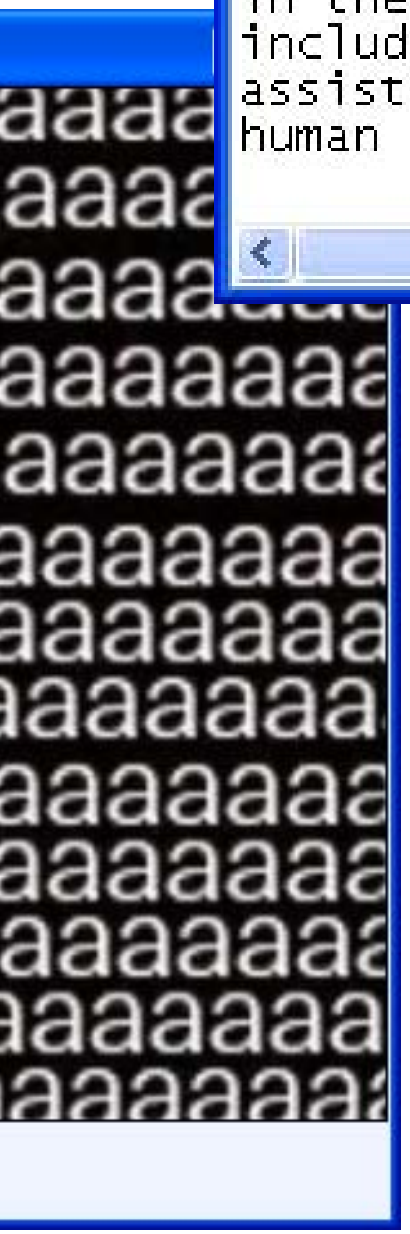
kleefkruid on Tumblr

kleefkruid

Follow

cats would be so fucking upset if they understood they were missing out on the ability to lie verbally

aaaa - snusmumriken113 on Tumblr

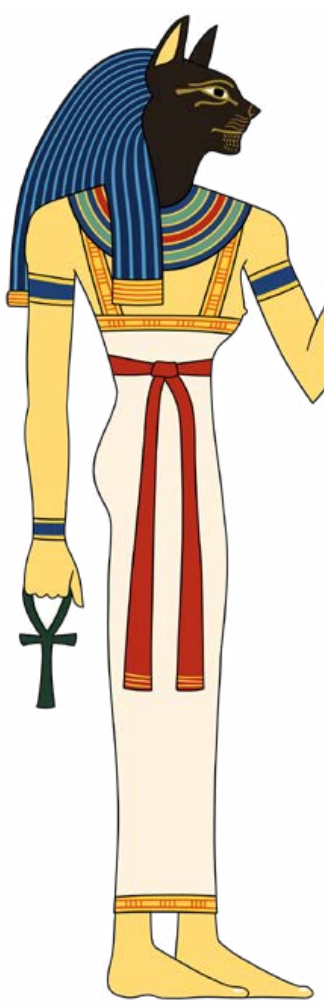


What is a Familiar

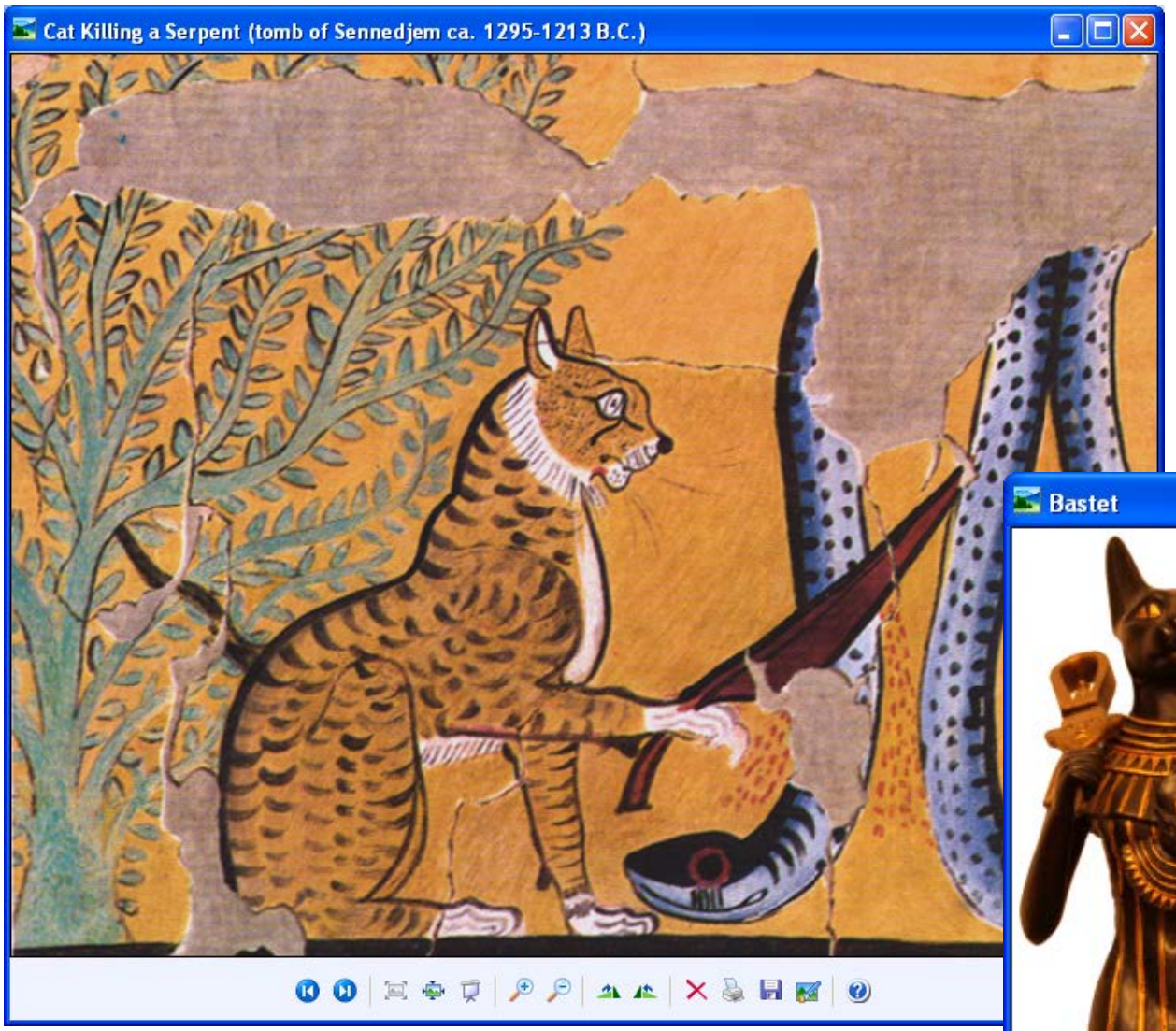
Soubor Úpravy Formát Zobrazení Nápověda

In folklore, a familiar is a loyal assistant in the form of an animal who provides aid including guidance, protection and magical assistance. They are connected with their human on a deeper spiritual level.

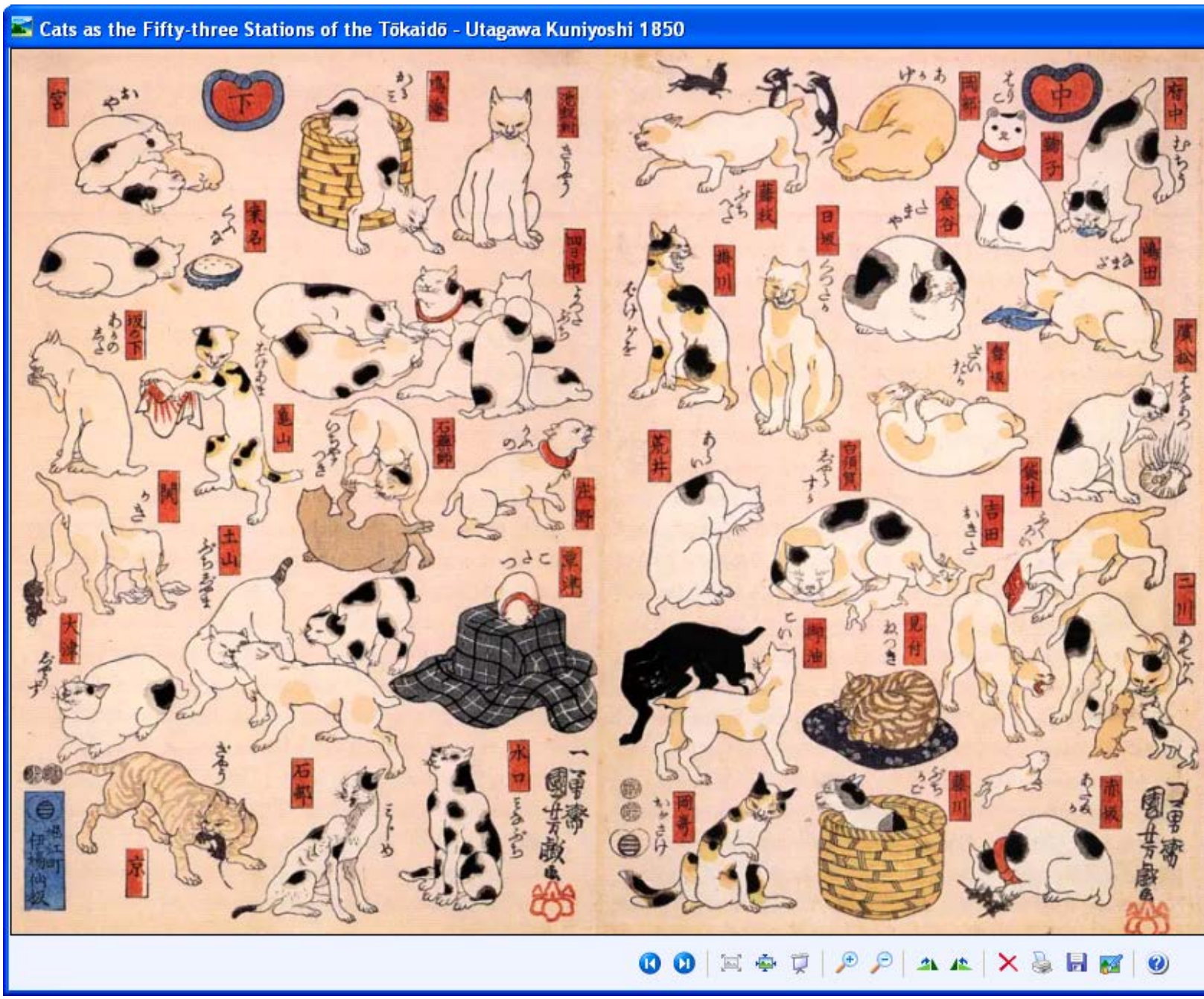
1. Cats and Spiritual Archetypes



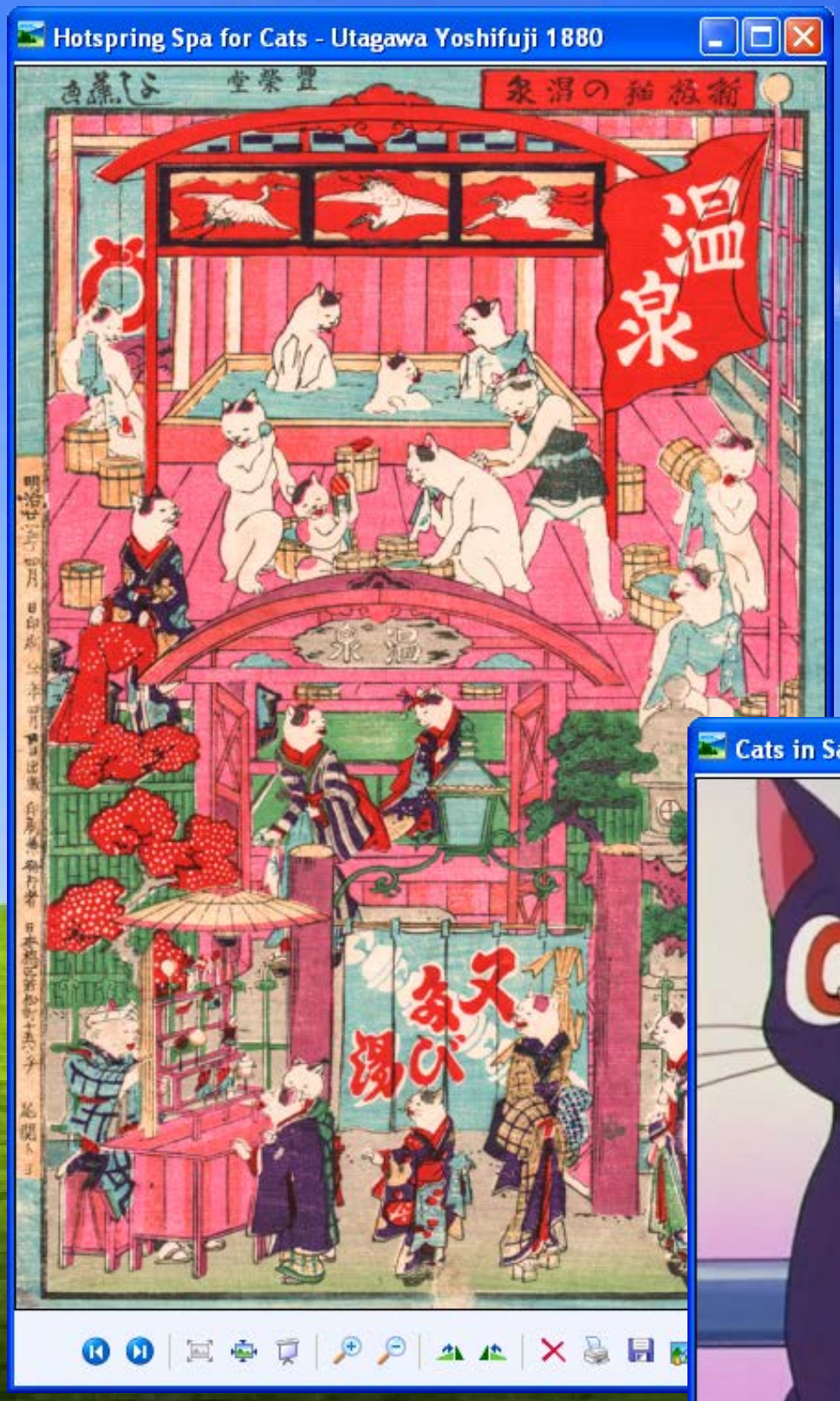
In ancient Egyptian society, cats played an important role, as they were initially highly valued in the household for their ability to protect produce from rodents and snakes but soon seen as divine animals, not so much for their usefulness, but rather for their demeanour – stealth, "spiritual" grace and glowing "all-seeing" eyes in the night. Many Egyptian goddesses donned the traits of a feline, with the most prominent being Bastet, associated with the protection of the home but also childbirth and female sexuality, who was often depicted with the head of a cat.

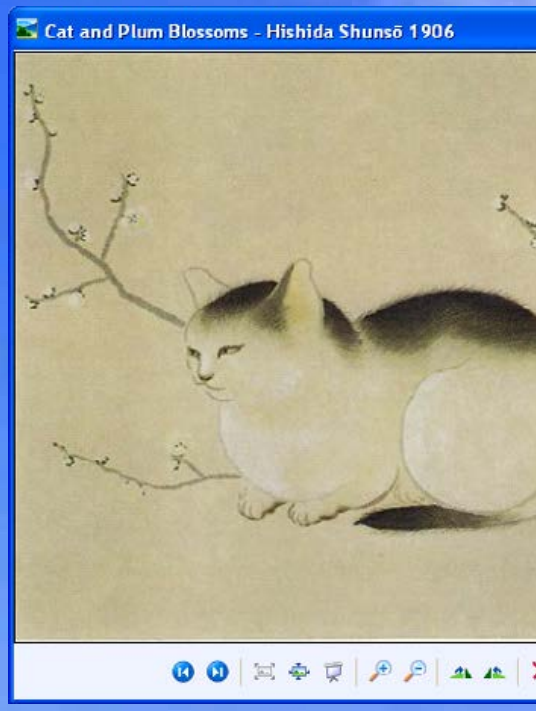

Cat Killing a Serpent (tomb of Sennedjem ca. 1295-1213 B.C.)

Bastet


Cats as the Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō - Utagawa Kuniyoshi 1850

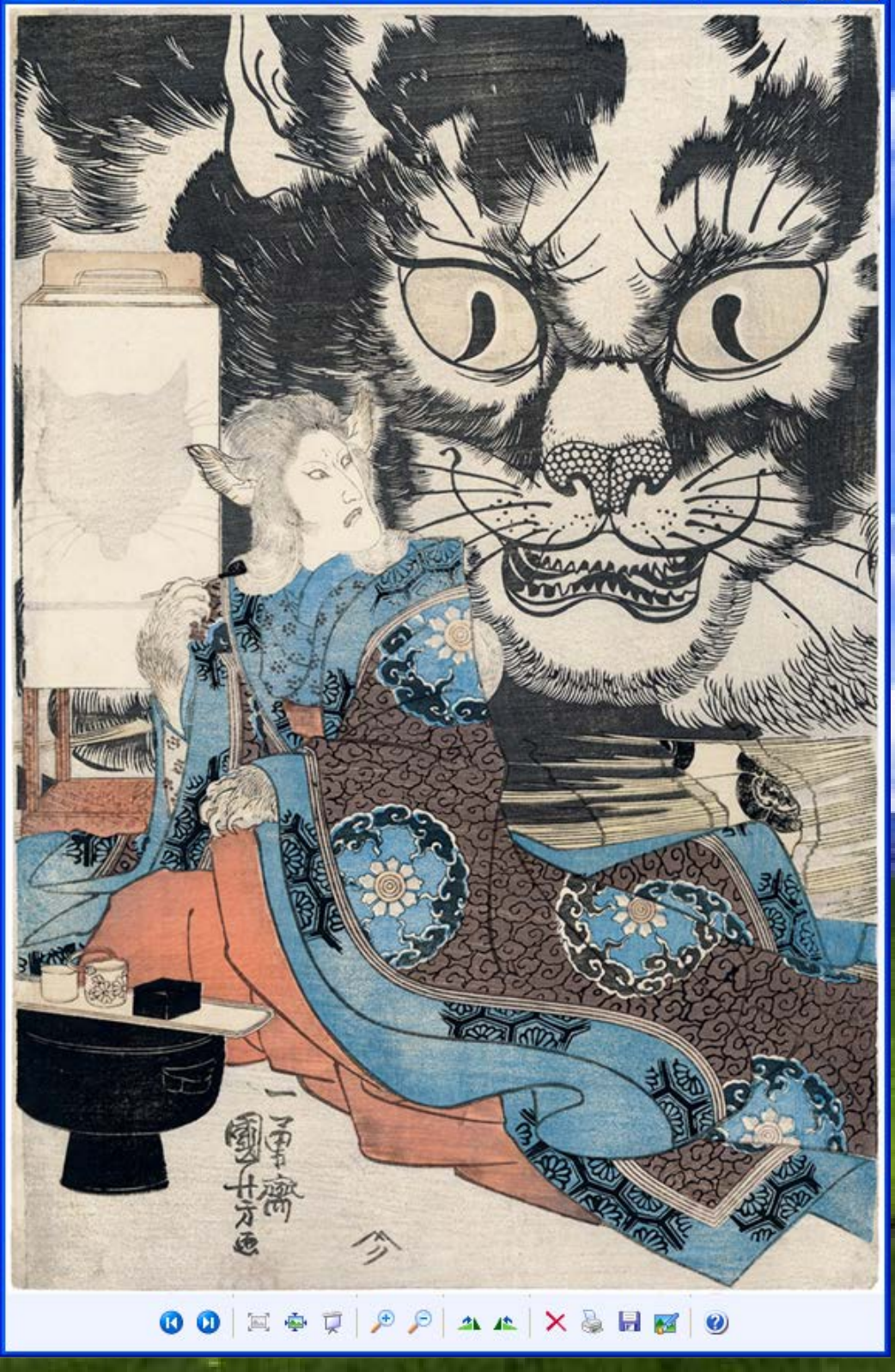
In Japanese folklore, cats were seen as protectors, demons, or liminal beings. They were attributed to bringing good or bad fortune at will. The depiction of the magical cat appears throughout the ages, seeping heavily into modern-day pop culture.

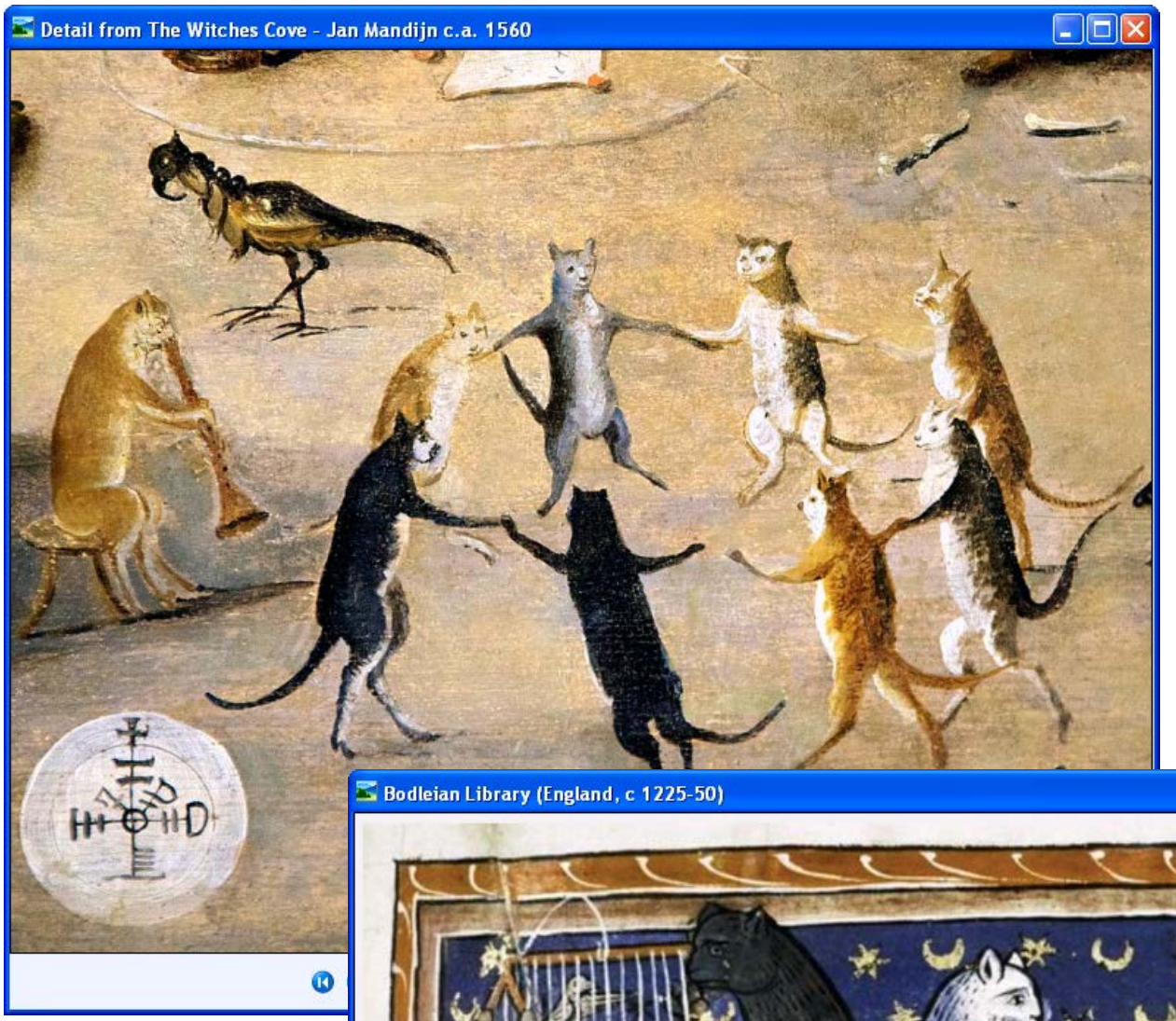

Hotspring Spa for Cats - Utagawa Yoshifuji 1880
温泉
豊榮堂
氷温
又ふび湯

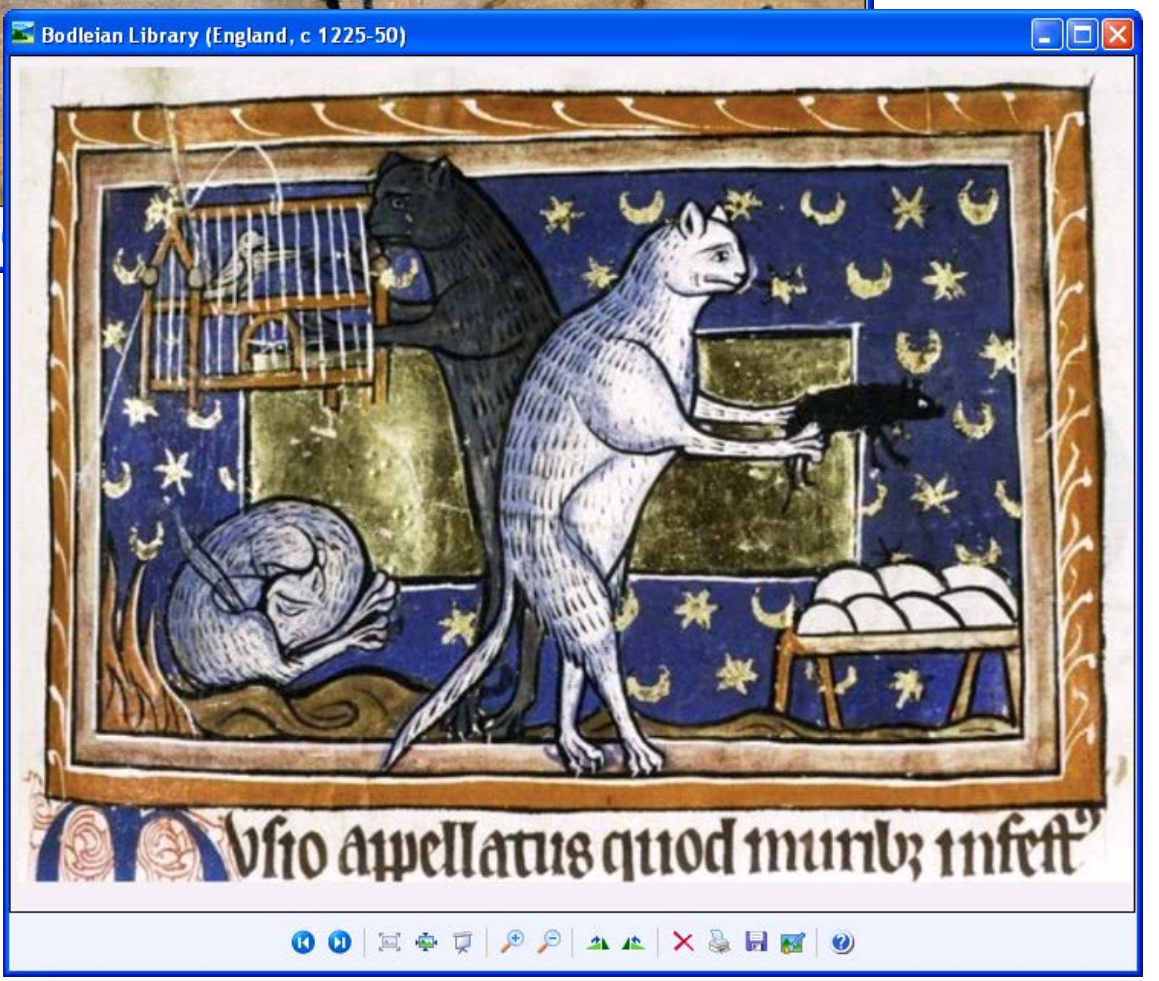

Cat and Plum Blossoms - Hishida Shunsō 1906

Cats in Sailor Moon

Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō, Scene at Okazaki - Utagawa Kuniyos



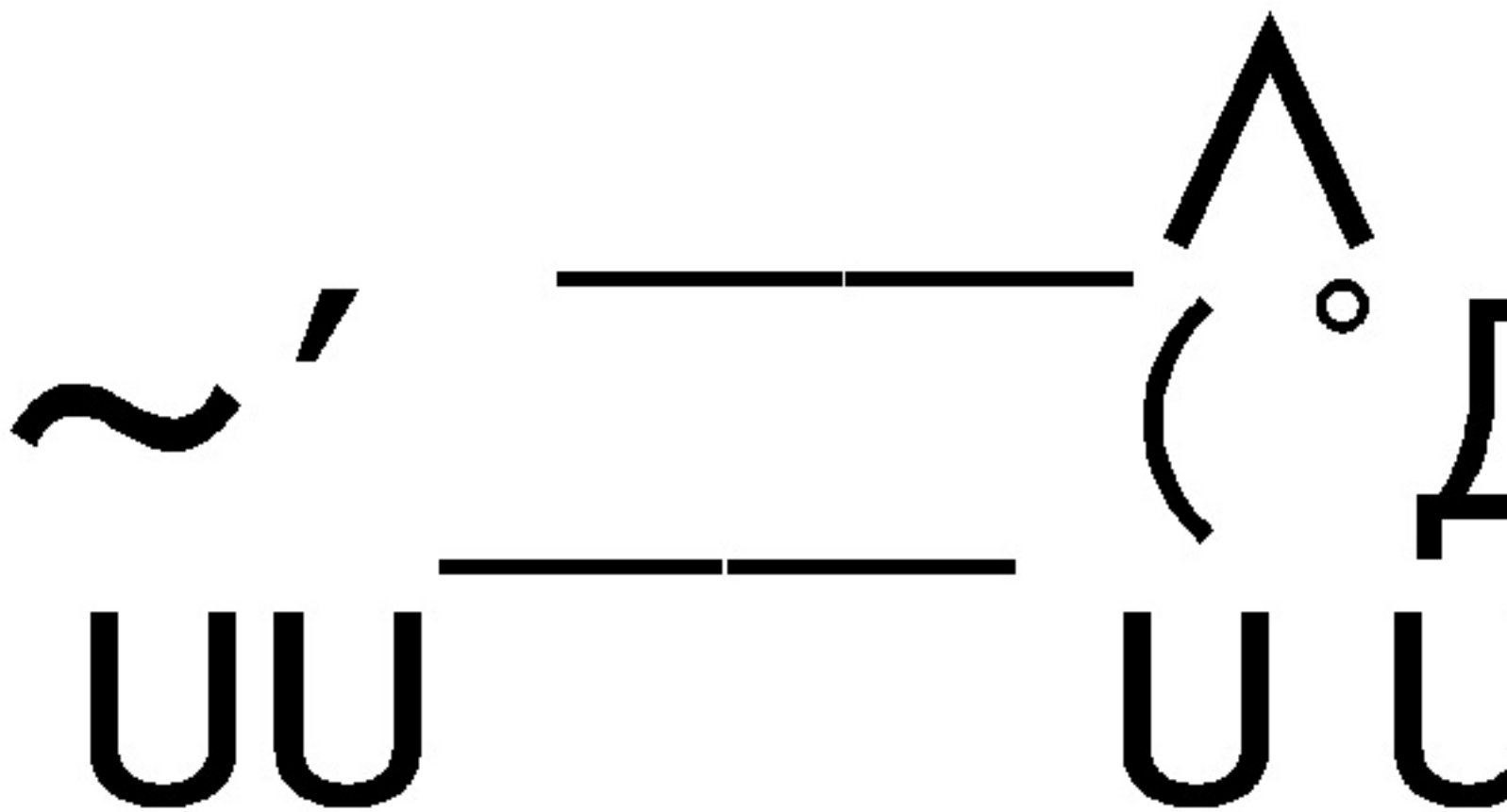

Detail from The Witches Cove - Jan Mandijn c.a. 1560

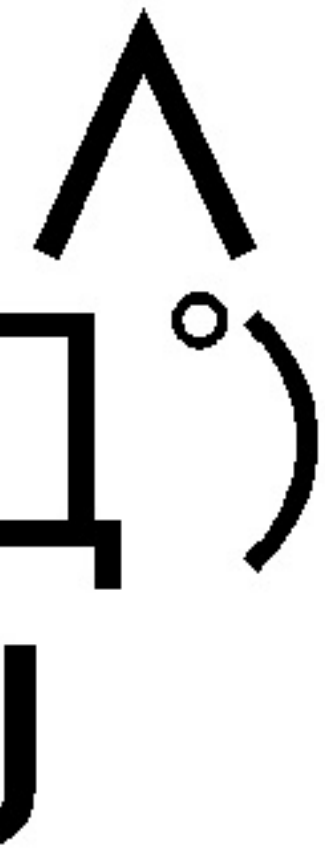

Bodleian Library (England, c 1225-50)
vsio appellatus quod murib; infest

In Europe, the cat was regarded as a guardian of the home and as a healer up until the Middle Ages, when they became vilified through Christian narratives serving as examples for bad moral behaviour. They became linked to evil spirits, Satan, and cunning female sexuality, becoming strongly associated with witchcraft.

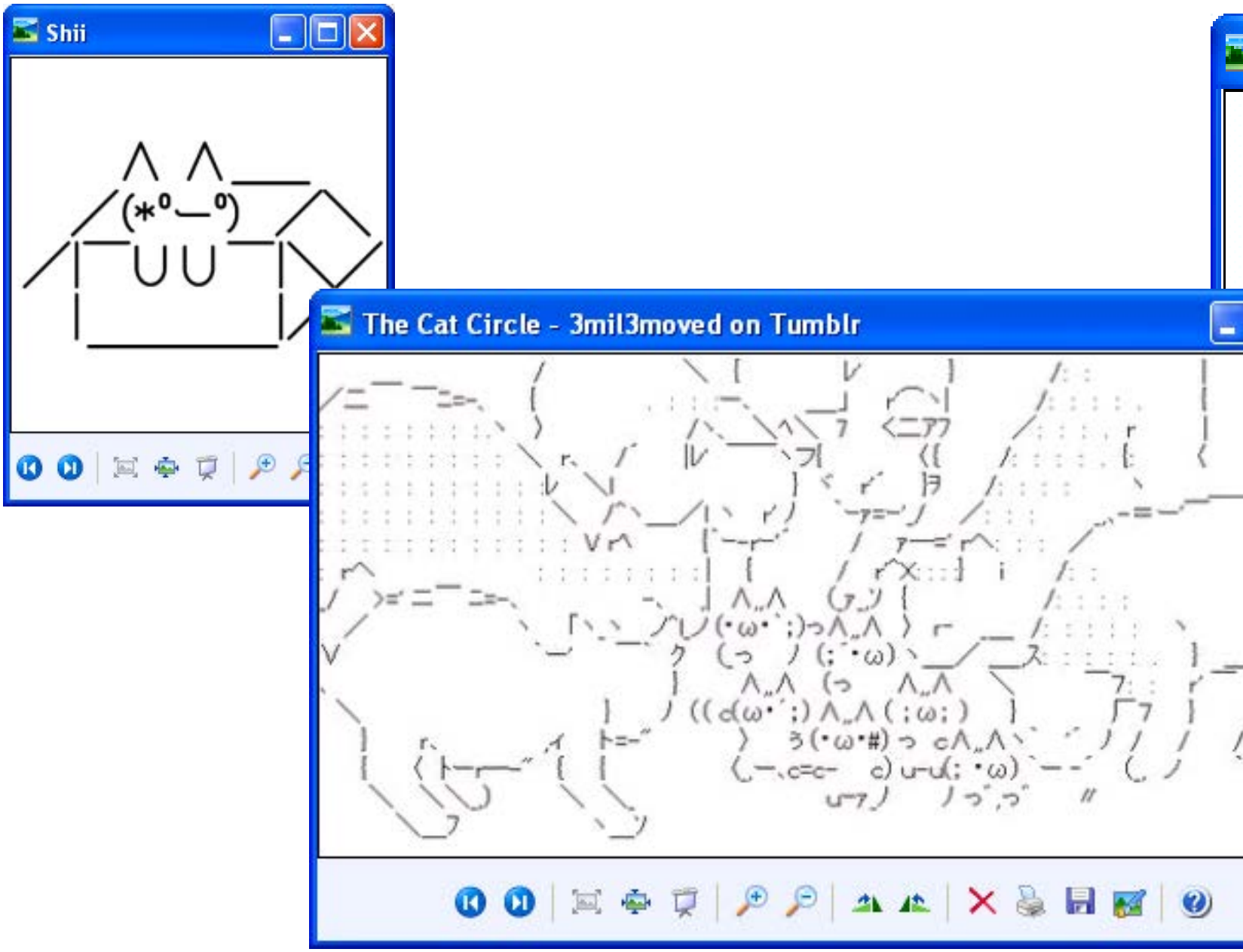
II. Cats

in memes



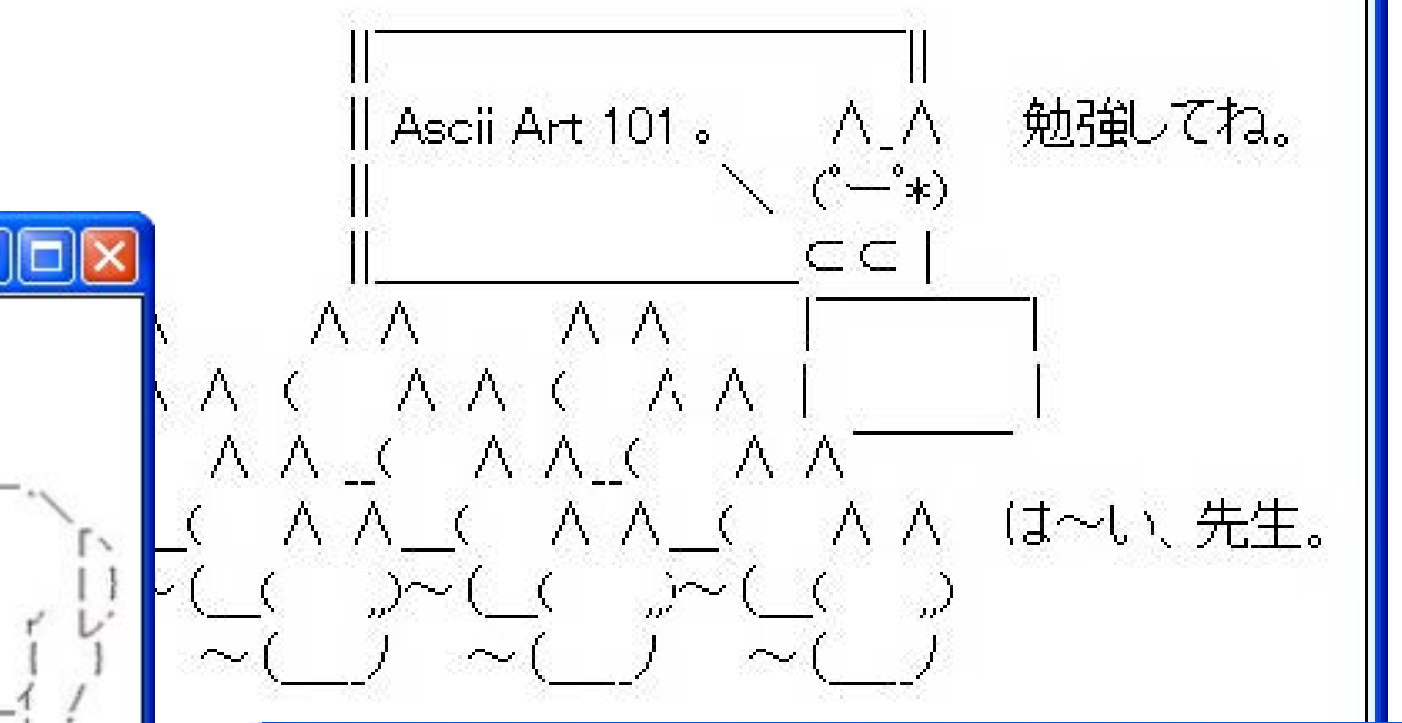


Like traditional rituals, memes manifest in repetitive, patterned ways. Creating or sharing a meme mirrors the repetition of symbolic actions in rituals, serving to reinforce meaning or belief. Meme-sharing creates a sense of collective identity, similar to how rituals bond religious or spiritual communities, using specific language and inside jokes to signify an in-group. Memes subtly communicate shared values, anxieties, and desires, presenting something both the sender and the receiver can identify with or project their own experience onto.

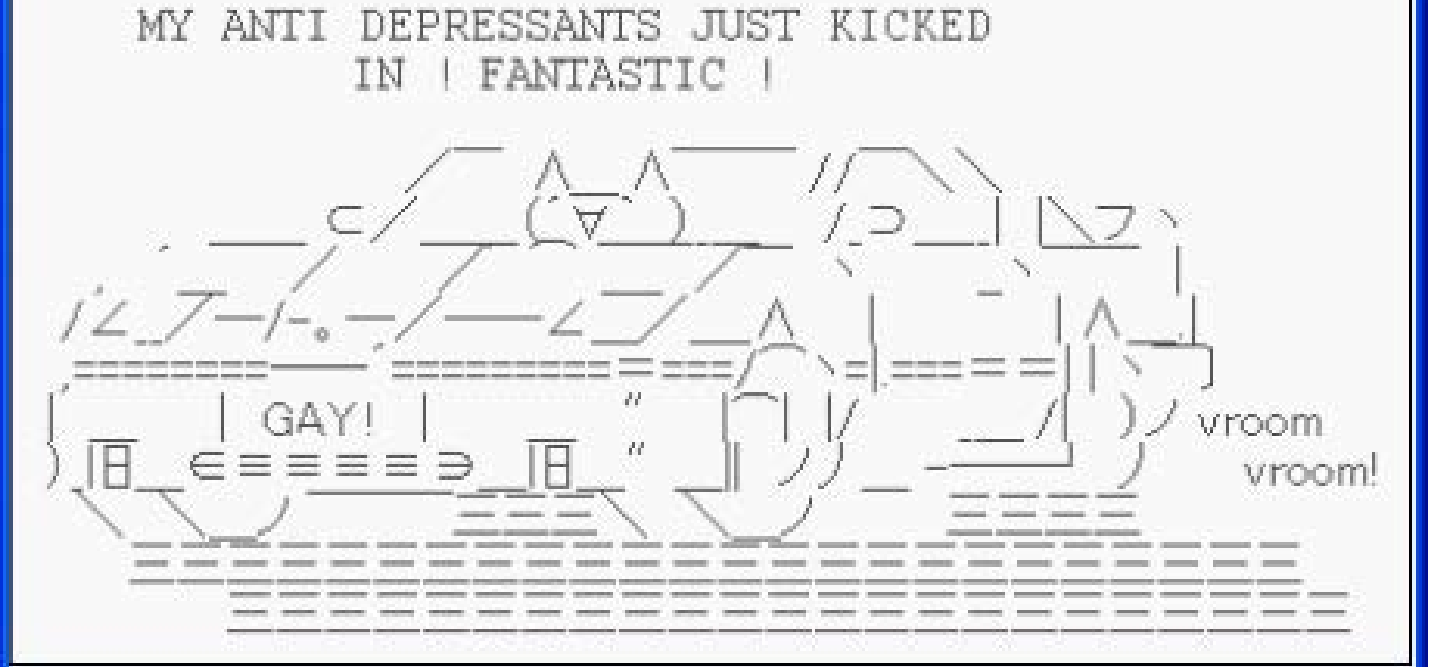


The predecessors of cat memes emerged on the Japanese message board 2chan, in the form of copy-paste ASCII art. The board users created these cat-shaped glyph characters, giving them distinct names and personalities. They were then distributed along the message boards with added or changed elements, giving them new meanings and scenarios.

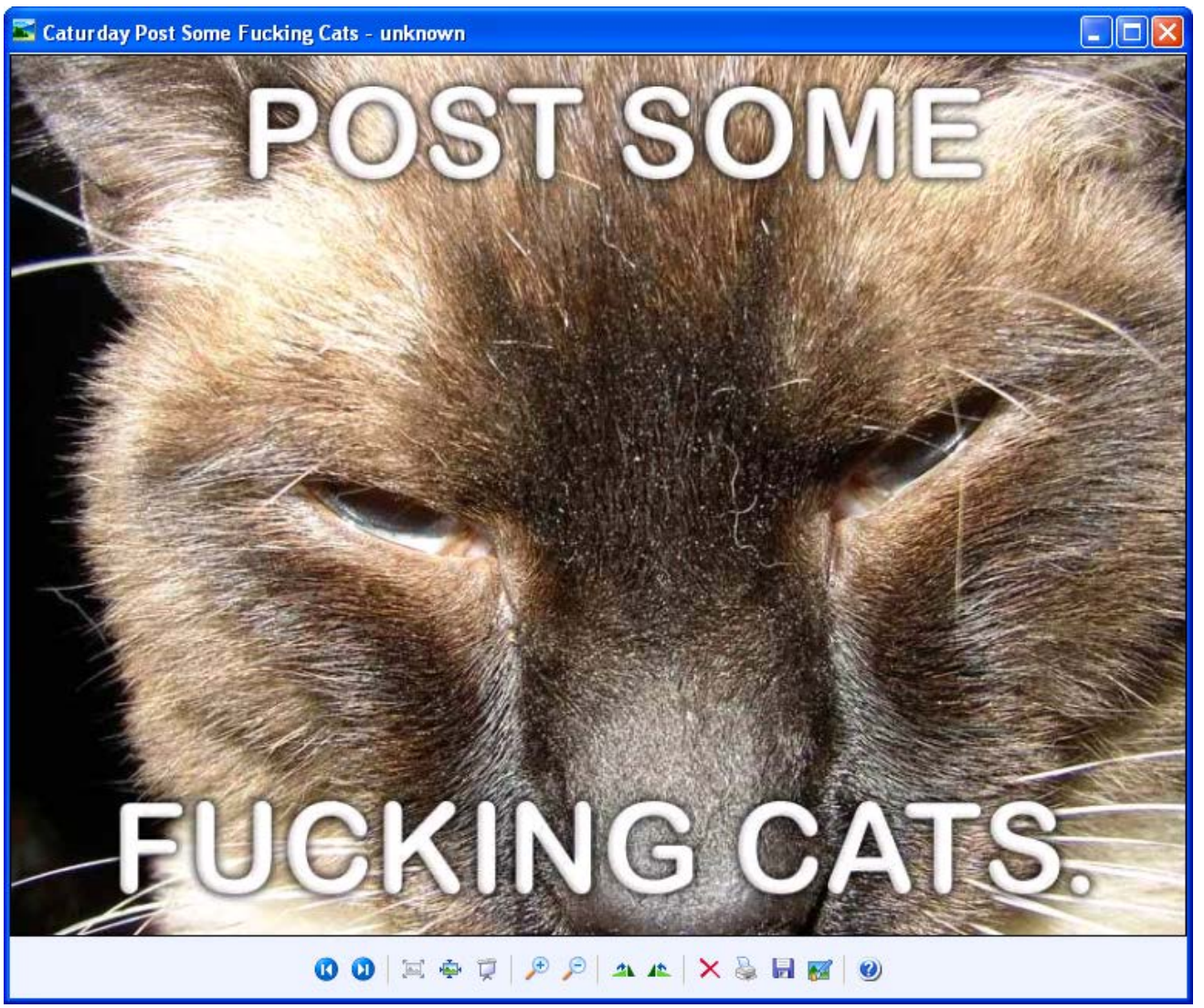
Ascii Art 101 - unknown



My Anti Depressants Just Kicked In! Fantastic!



A few years later, on 4chan, a western successor of 2chan, a weekly tradition started on the /b/ ("random") board, to post cute cat photos every Saturday, coined Caturday, to counteract the usual wave of inappropriate content. Here, the cats, although posted mostly in irony, served as a sort of cleansing ritual to give the site a break from the negative energy.



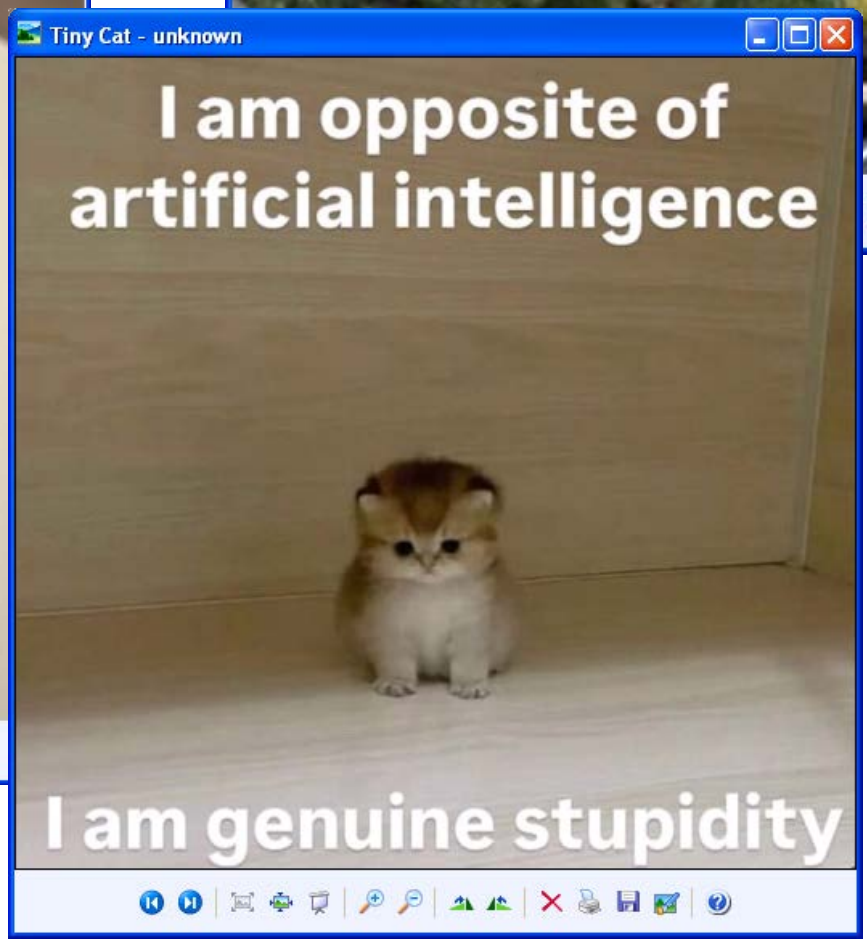
Soon after, the lolcat format emerged – a cat photo accompanied by text, stylised as if the animal wrote it itself, with bad spelling and nonexistent grammar. From thereon, cats have become somewhat inescapable online, showing up in various meme formats or through individual pets becoming viral sensations.

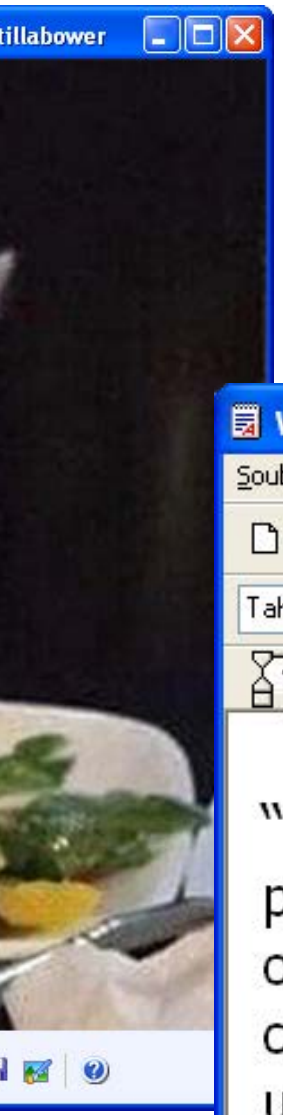
I Can Has Cheezburger - FancyCat on Something Awful
I CAN HAS CHEEZBURGER?
Haters Gonna Hate - unknown
HATERS GONNA HATE
Grumpy Cat -Tabath
I HAD
IT W

Longcat Apocalypse -unknown on 2chan
LONGCAT APOCALYPSE
SOON ALL WILL
HAS A FLAVOR
a and Brian Bundesen
FUN ONCE
AS AWFUL

Gandalf licking a Graham Cracker - indooroutdoorkat on Tiktok
TikTok
@indooroutdoorkat
Today is Monday, which means that Gandalf gets to lick a graham cracker...

Smudge, sitting at a dinner table behind a salad - Miranda S


Tiny Cat - unknown
I am opposite of artificial intelligence
I am genuine stupidity



White, A Unified Theory of Cats on the Internet, 12-13.

Soubor Úpravy Zobrazit Vložit Formát Nápověda

Tahoma 18 Západní

"For the extremely online, cats have become a basic part of cultural literacy—a signifier, in Miltner's term, of the internetty, or the internet understood as a culture unto itself—while for the rest of the internet's users, cats belong to the suite of online rituals that we perform even if we have forgotten their origin."

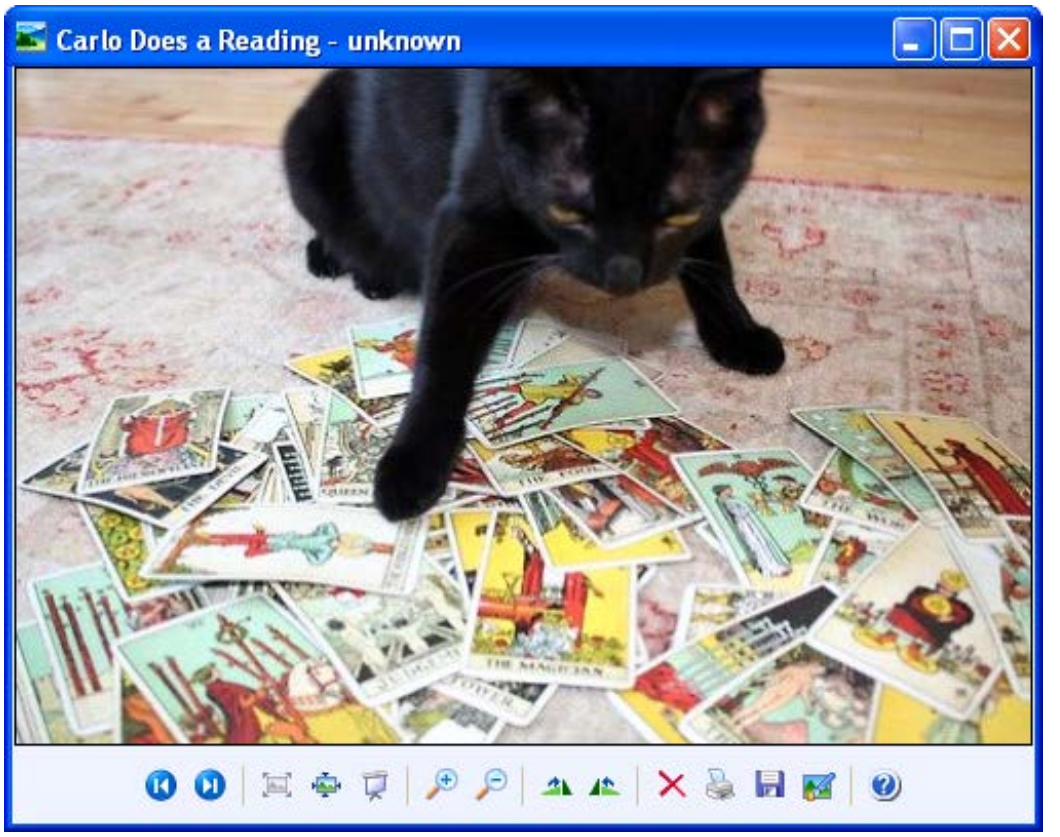
Nápovědu zobrazíte stisknutím klávesy F1.

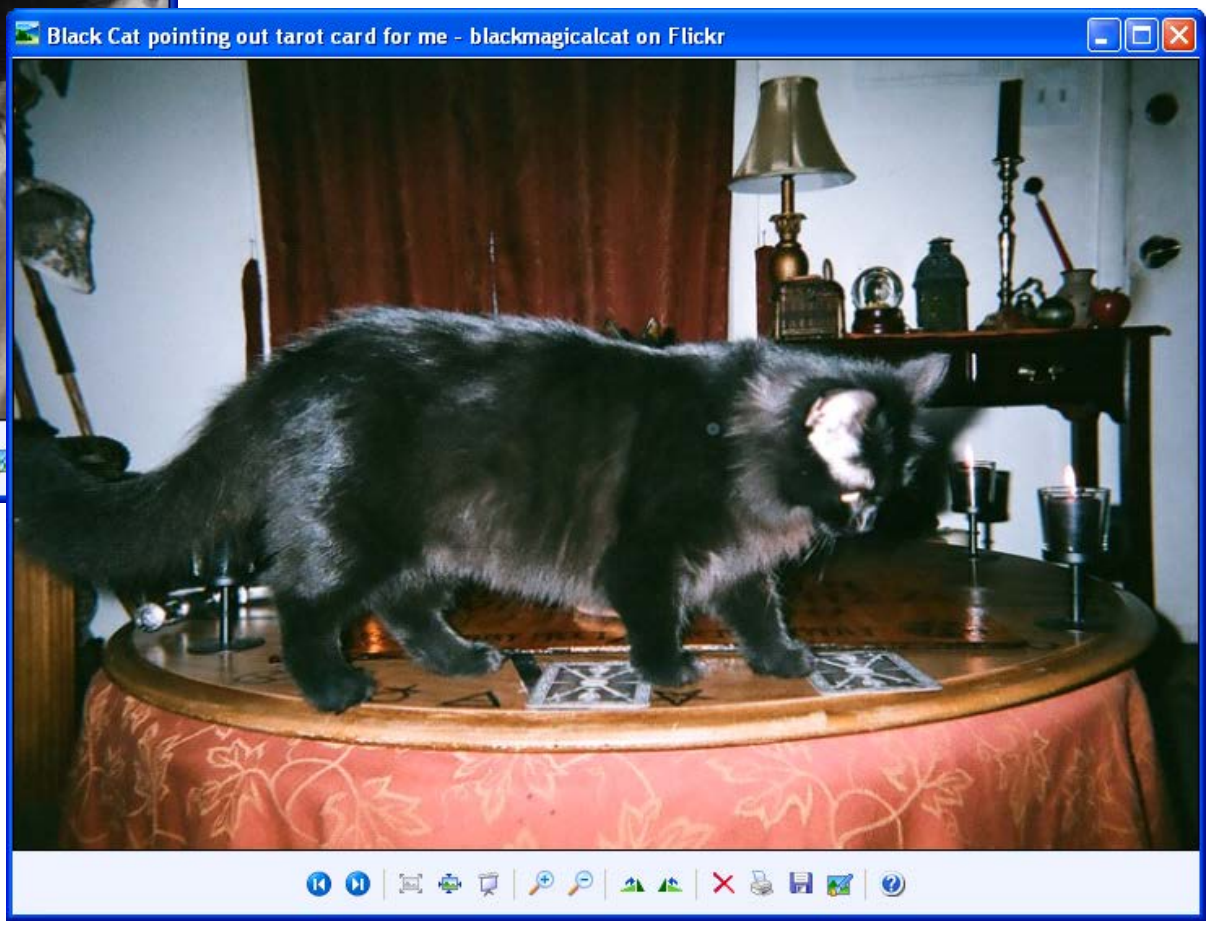
III. Online

Witchcraft Communities

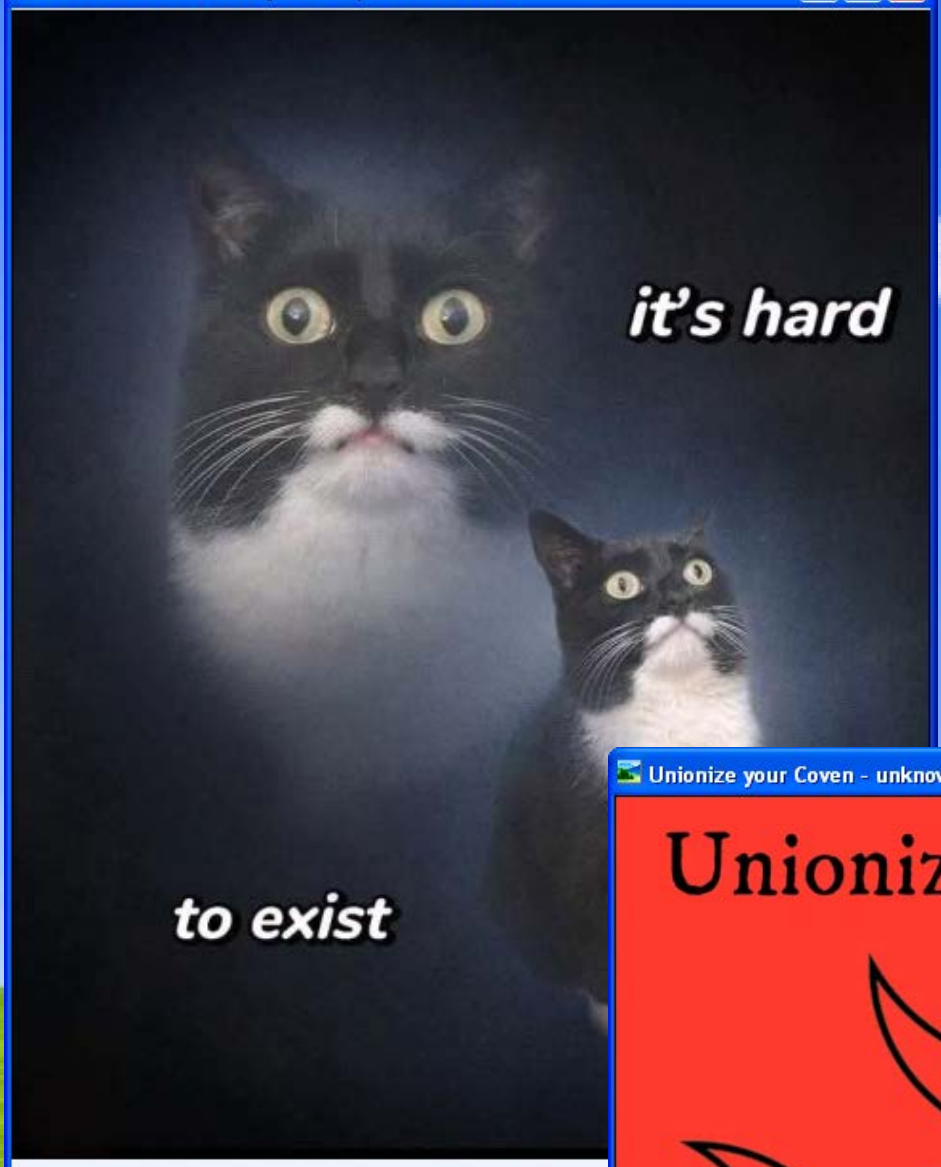
In the past two decades, digital witchcraft has surged in popularity, especially among Gen Z, through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Tumblr. As the world becomes more chaotic and fast-paced, people turn to internet occultism as a place of refuge, practising individual forms of spirituality in order to instill purpose into their lives, and gain a sense of control. These online communities are centred mostly around spells, astrology, tarot, and occult practices with a focus on aesthetics, identity politics, and self-care.

Cats often appear in digital witchcraft content posed beside candles, crystals, or tarot decks. Their visual presence evokes a lineage: from historical associations with witches to contemporary mystical vibes, with black cats being especially prominent. They are integrated into aesthetic signifiers of the “witch” identity, alongside astrological motifs, herbal bundles, and a dark colour palette.


Carlo Does a Reading - unknown

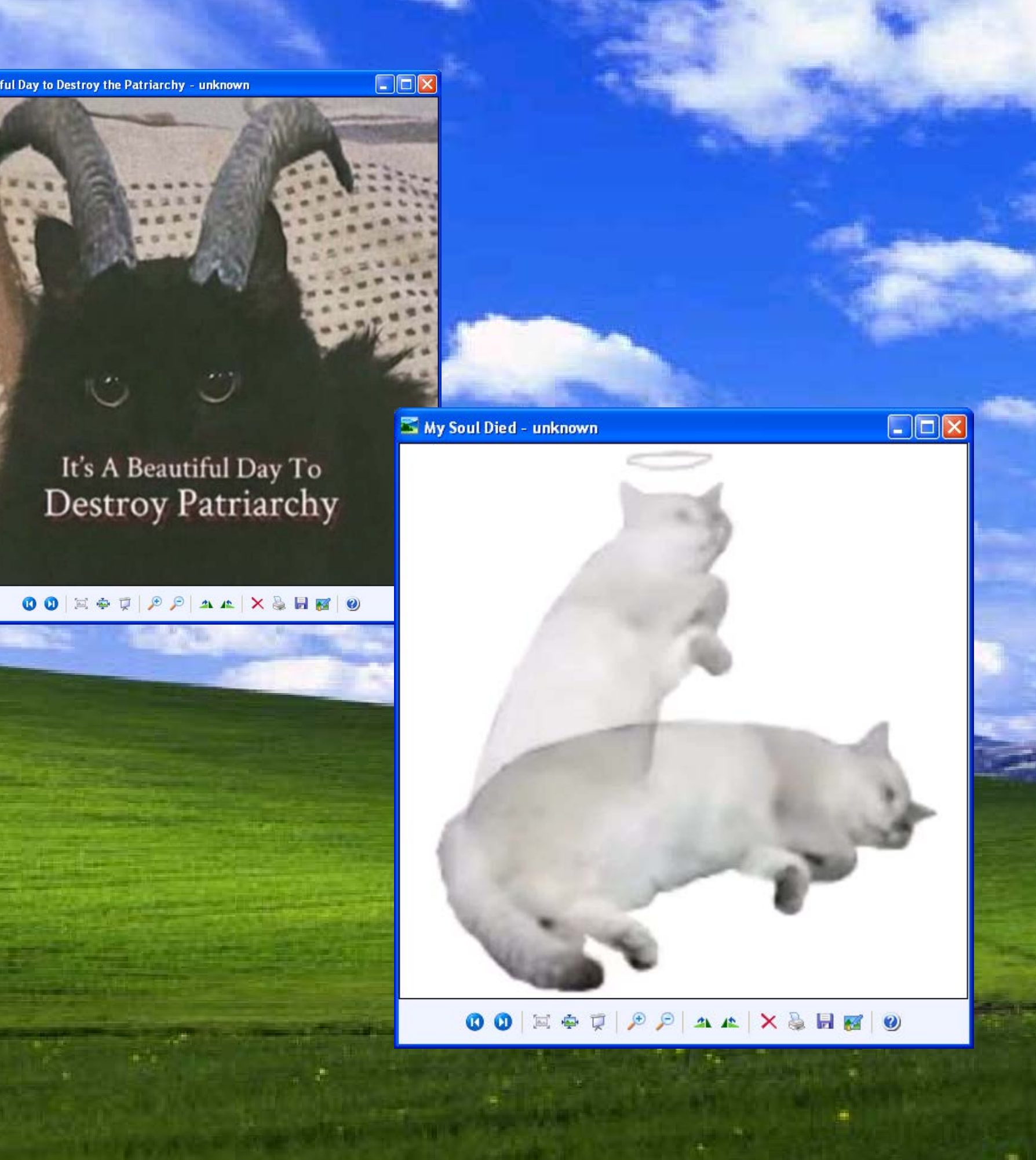

Black Cat pointing out tarot card for me - blackmagicalcat on Flickr

Its Hard to Exist - photo by Olan Meows



Unionize your Coven - unknown

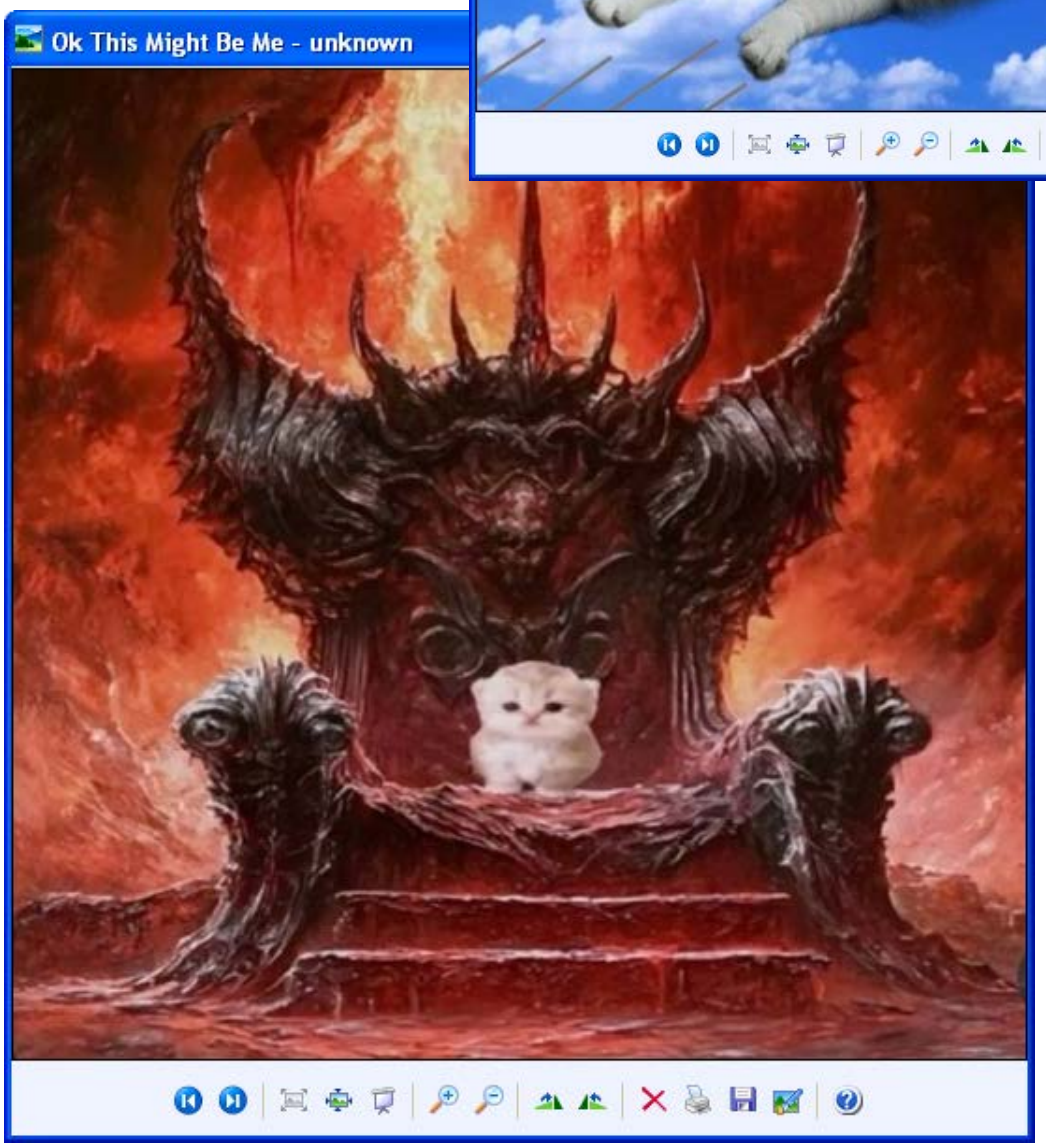
Beauti

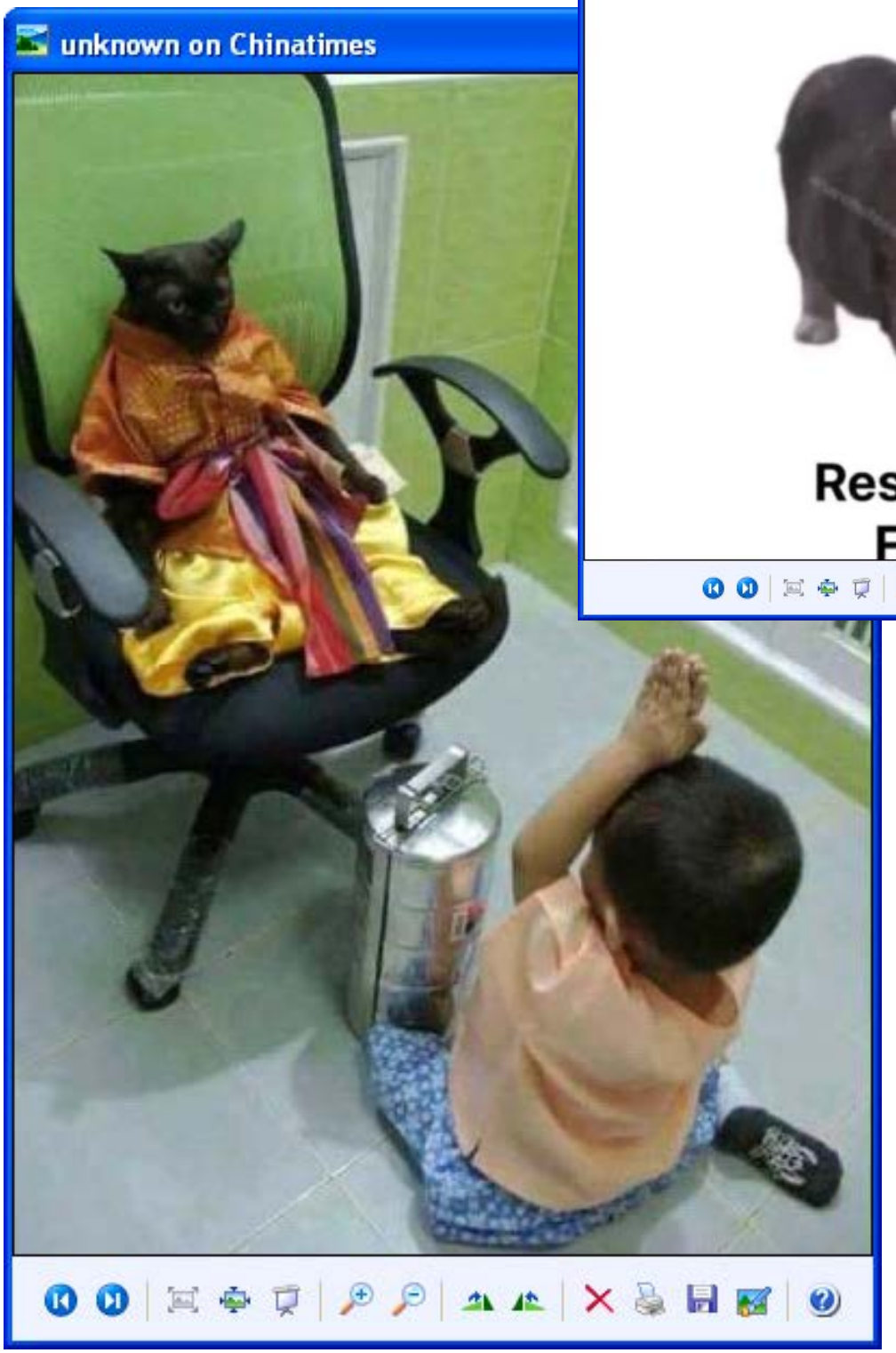

ful Day to Destroy the Patriarchy - unknown
It's A Beautiful Day To
Destroy Patriarchy
My Soul Died - unknown

IV. The Cat as a Digital Familiar

The cats online function as digital familiars – emotionally resonant, spiritually charged companions in cyberspace. Internet users can identify with them, projecting their emotions, life situations, worries, or desires. They can serve as both private talismans and public identity markers. They can protect us from the horrors of the outside world, as well as the horrors the internet can bring. They become the subject of the ritual of meme-sharing, enabling us to connect to them and the emotions they represent.

Paula Deen Riding a Flying Cat - unknown


Ok This Might Be Me - unknown


unknown on Chinatimes

Psyop Cat - unknown
Thoughts: intrusive
Actions: questionable
Results: silly
Fun: had

Online witchcraft and meme culture repurpose the cat as a digital familiar, reenchanting digital life through symbolism and ritual. The online cat serves the same purpose as an IRL cat does, and has throughout the ages, the purpose of a companion. In a disenchanted world, cats offer continuity between ancient spiritual archetypes and the playful, mystical cultures of the internet.

Sources

Soubor Úpravy Zobrazit Vložit Formát Nápověda

Tahoma 12 Západní

Bibliography:

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White, E.J.. *A Unified Theory of Cats on the Internet*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9-781-5036-0463-6.

Yalcinkaya, Günseli. *"God in the machine: the emergence of nu-spiritualism online."* Dazed Spring Issue 2023. https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/58467/1/god-in-the-machine-the-emergence-of-nu-spiritualism-online-spring-2023.

Online Resources:

www.knowyourmeme.com
https://mememanifesto.space/#!the-deeps

Nápovědu zobrazíte stisknutím klávesy F1.